

Flat Creek flooding is receiving a scientific once over

By Ben Graham Jackson Hole Daily | Posted: Thursday, December 3, 2015 4:30 am

Intermittent winter flooding has proven to be an enigma for those who live along Flat Creek, but a study launched in November is supposed to help answer some questions about the phenomenon.

The Teton Conservation District has agreed to put nearly \$50,000 into an analysis of the creek. The goal, according to Carlin Girard, the district's water resource specialist, is "to better understand what type of conditions are present and how they might relate to ice formation."

The study was initiated by a new tax district, called the Flat Creek Watershed Improvement District, formed by property owners along the creek. The analysis will track the creek's physical conditions during the winter, from air temperature to water level.

Flooding on Flat Creek occurs when temperatures plummet, causing ice dams to build up and the creek's water level to rise. But flooding has been irregular in recent years. Some winters have passed without significant flooding. Other years have brought severe damage to homes along the creek. In the past the Town of Jackson has used heavy machinery to break up ice dams and reduce water levels.

The new study should provide more information about what conditions lead to flooding, which could in turn help officials better combat flooding.

"We're trying to gather data to see if we can put two pieces of the puzzle together," said Bill Wotkyns, chairman of the Flat Creek Watershed Improvement District.

Data collection is being conducted by Jackson firm Alder Environmental. Crews have already installed survey points along the creek, including instruments that monitor the creek's elevation and temperature, said Brian Remlinger, owner of the consulting firm.

The project also involves documenting where and how ice forms, Girard said.

"This is the first effort to my knowledge where there's been a very structured and scientific approach," he said.

People who live along the creek have had an early taste of flooding this year. The stream overran its banks this week, causing ice and water to spill over a portion of the pathway just upstream from Russ Garaman Park in west Jackson. Wotkyns said he wasn't aware of water reaching any homes. By Wednesday a thick coat of ice covered a large portion of the pathway.

The formation of the Flat Creek district came last year, after town officials said they were wary of liability issues with sending heavy machinery into the stream. Property owners who wanted to take

matters into their own hands initiated the process of forming the district. It was voted into existence last December.

Wotkyns said any decisions about how to battle flooding should it occur this year would be made in collaboration with the town and Teton Conservation District.